



Spotlights on the Problematic Study of Saladin's History (1138-1193 A.D)

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Abstract: This paper does spotlights on the problematic study of history of Saladin the famous leader of Islamic front during the conflict between Muslims and crusaders in the middle ages. We can notice this problematic study as follows: the expansion of the geographical scope of his own history, the multiplicity of contemporary and late history sources that dealt with his history, the abundance of modern literature on Saladin, the global history of Saladin, falling into the charisma of the historical hero, his history literatures concentrated on showing him as an individual leader, historical responsibility, overlap of Saladin's history with the history of Nur ad-Din Mahmoud, his military and political history is not balanced with his civilizational role, highlighting the masculine character of Saladin, Finally mythical side of his history, contrasting vision of prominent Mosul historians Ibn Al Atheer and Bahaa al-Dn Ibn Shaddad.

Keywords -:Saladin- problematic study- Nur ad-Din Mahmoud- Crusades- middle ages

I. INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the problematic aspects of writing the history of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi ⁽¹⁾ (1138 - 1193 AD), the knight of Islam during the era of confrontation between the West Europeans and Muslims over the lands of the Levant and Egypt.

In the beginning, some may think that writing the history of that prominent leader is an affordable and easy matter, but there are several difficulties and obstacles facing those who confront this task, and these can be summarized through the following elements:

First: The expansion of the geographical scope of his own history; as its state extended from Aleppo - the capital of the northern Levant - to Nubia in southern Egypt, and from Hijaz in the east to Cyrenaica in the west, and thus his reign territory was distributed between the continents of Asia and Africa, including a part of the southern coast of the Mediterranean, and sometimes the eastern, as well as the coasts of the Red Sea on its two banks.

We also do not overlook the multiplicity of his conquests, especially in the aftermath of the decisive Battle of Hattin on July 4, 1187AD ⁽²⁾, as we have dozens of geographical locations that were an area of warfare between his forces, the Crusaders and by the Zankites.

This required of any researcher in his history to follow his policy, battles and actions over a wide geographical range through the fact that geography guides history, and history is nothing but the struggle over geography, without neglecting the influence of other factors of course.

Nevertheless, we must here acknowledge that concern for the geographical dimension in its history does not mean falling into the circle of geographical determinism, because man himself is - thanks to God Almighty - the original maker of history and he is the one who can benefit from the geographical element or vice versa.

Second: The multiplicity of contemporary and late historical sources that dealt with its history, in the form of Arab, Latin, Greek, Syriac, Coptic, and Jewish sources ⁽³⁾, in a way that brought us to an unprecedented abundance of source, quantity and quality, which makes the researcher for the history of Saladin confronting The multiplicity and diversity of many sources which he must deal with, in order to reach as close as possible to the historical truth, not to mention the difference of opinions between one historian and another, between supporters and opponents who show different degrees of support and opposition, which is a theme we do not find in the history of other Muslim leaders in the era of the Crusades over the 12th and 13th centuries.

Third: The abundance of modern literatures on Saladin, which, without exaggeration, are in thousands; as any author studies the Crusades, especially the Crusades occurred in the 12th century, rarely neglects that Arab prominent leader.

Thus, there are studies in Arabic, English, French, German, Italian and Russian ⁽⁴⁾ ... etc., and we do not lose sight of the availability of constant material about him in all the international encyclopedias in the East and West ⁽⁵⁾, in a way that brought us before what can be described, without exaggeration, as "Bibliotheca Saladino". We have to admit here, that history has neither yet said his last word on Saladin,

nor will say it, and here lies the pleasure of study of his biography and works , so each author presented his own perception of that leader, and consequently added what he has written about in many languages of the world, and there is no doubt that this puts the researcher in his history In front of another difficulty of monitoring and analyzing what was written about Saladin, which is varied in quantity and quality, and shows clearly what happened to the historical sources , either written contemporary to the time of Saladin , or lately . (6)

Fourth: There is a global history does focus on Saladin , as the Middle Ages' history of France, England, Germany, Byzantium, and Italy , especially of the period between 1171 and 1193 AD , is not written without mentioning him, so we find his name included in the English, French, German, and Byzantine historians' chronicles.

This situation has led the historians to search deeply in

The multi-lingual historical sources on Saladin , and it is worthy here to note that there is no such global character among other leaders of the Islamic Jihad movement in the era of the Crusades , from the Atabeg of Mosul, Sharaf al-Din Mawdud (7) (1108-1113 AD) until the Mamluk Sultan, Al-Ashraf Khalil Ibn Qalawun (8) (1290 - 1293 AD).

The Third Crusade had a prominent role in shaping that global history. The German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (9) (1152-1190 AD), the French king Philip II August (10) (1180-1226 AD) Philip II Augustus, and the English king Richard Lionhearted (11) participated in it (1189-1199 AD), and Saladin dealt with them by way of correspondence or other, such as the case of the German Emperor, or through a war clash as the case of the monarchs of France, England, and in particular the latter.

He also did not overlook his relations with the Italian commercial cities (12) such as Genoa, through the conclusion of trade agreements, Venicia and Pisa, and all of that had its own impact on a historical international phenomenon.

Fifth: Falling into the charisma of the historical hero (13); As that Sultan possessed a charismatic personality (14) influencing deeply those around him, which is something we clearly realize through an explicit text presented to us by the physician, historian and traveler, Muwaffaq al-Din Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi (15) (d.1231 CE), and reported by Ibn Abi Usaybe'ah (16) (d.1268 A.D.) in his book " Uyun al-Anbaa fi Tabaqat al-Atabaa –or , Classes of the Physicians " .

We can say that the historians who were contemporary to Saladin, especially those who dealt with him directly for long periods of time, were influenced in one way or another by this charisma in a way that extends to our current era!! Through a personal scholar and researches' experience that spanned over several years of coexistence with the aforementioned historical hero, i ensure the existence of this captivating charisma which overwhelms those who are trying to delve into the study of his biography and historical career from various political, military and cultural aspects.

The risk of falling into the charisma of Saladin , despite the passage of several centuries after his death on March 4, 1193 A.D, lies in the unconscious bias towards him , and in the justification of all his policies, without realizing that ,eventually , Saladin is just a human, he may do good and may make mistakes. Such does happen because we , in the academic research , must not study the biographies and careers of historical characters in the way of imaging them as saints or persons Whom We we tend to surround with an aura of holiness of our own making , because that would alienate us from the spirit of the binding historical objectivity.

Sixth: His history literatures concentrated on showing him as an individual leader, but neglected the impact of the contemporary men surrounded him, and as a matter of fact, there are many researchers who highlighted his history through the idea of the only hero, and the savior who liberated Jerusalem (17) which he opened as a victorious military leader on October 2, 1187 A.D. Therefore, many studies appeared in The Arab world - in particular - have an emotional and sentimental character bearing phrases such as " destroyer of the Crusader aggression " (18) or " the expected savior " (19), and other expressions that express nostalgia, especially when the enemies clash against the Arab nation , and the past becomes an inspiration to them in one way or another.

Actually, that leader came to express an entire era in all its spiritual, intellectual, and political dimensions. And we must here acknowledge the mutual influence between the leading hero and the original hero that gave birth to him, i.e his own historical era and society.

In my opinion, the youngest soldier in his army participated in making his military glory as well as the blacksmith he made for him his famous Damascene sword, as the marginalized (20) have their undeniable role in forming the history of that prominent leader in the era of the Crusades.

Seventh: Historical responsibility, between historical reality and justification.

In general, we find that a number of historians who sympathized with the history of Saladin do not mention any mistakes to him, and they justify them subconsciously through their emotional enthusiasm

towards him. In my view, this way is not the best one to deal with his history, as there is a historical responsibility for Saladin, which we notice in several situations as follows:

1- The aforementioned Sultan bears the responsibility for defeating his army in the battle of Tel Al-Jazar, or Montgisar ⁽²¹⁾ in 1177 AD, against the Crusaders. Among the defeat's reasons is his poor scouting, and his lack of possession of fortified castles in the middle of Sinai that he may resort to upon withdrawal. The Ayyubid sources referred to the aforementioned defeat as the "fragment of Ramlah", while the official historian of the Crusaders, William of Tire (d. 1186 AD), detailed it in his book "Historia rerum".⁽²²⁾

2- Saladin is responsible for the defeat of his army in the Battle of Arsuf, ⁽²³⁾ in 1191 AD, where his army collided with Richard the Lionheart's army, who chose to proceed through the coastal path, "Via Marina". Suddenly, the sudden attack had accomplished by two of the Hospitaliers' Knights in such a way that the English king gave orders to attack all Saladin's army, hence the defeat of the latter occurred.

Nevertheless, according to history, this commander learned from his mistakes, developed the capabilities of his army, took care of the scouting and was keen to build fortresses in the middle of Sinai ⁽²⁴⁾, being the natural geographical extension of the Negev desert in southern Palestine, and he also realized that the confrontation of the crusaders would take place from the north through the Golan Heights down to Upper Galilee and not from the south via the old Horus road in the northern Sinai Peninsula, so that the supply lines for his army would not be far distant.

We also do not overlook his adherence to Jerusalem, as he did not neglect it, despite the defeat of Arsuf in 1191 AD.

From what mentioned above, we conclude that the two aforementioned defeats did not break his will to continue the Jihad against the Crusaders.

3- He did not listen to the advice of his doctors about the necessity of resting in order to preserve his health, and there is no doubt that health was the price paid by that Sultan who led the war against the Crusader invaders.

4- He was overcome by his passion of parenthood, when he divided his possession among his many sons in a way that led to their struggle consequently.

It is worth noting, when we mention those negative aspects for which he bears responsibility, that they do not definitely undermine his position, but an unbiased historical researcher has the desire to get close - as much as possible - to the historical truth without falsification.

Eighth: Saladin's history overlaps with the history of Nur al-Din Mahmoud ⁽²⁵⁾ (1146 - 1174 AD), in a way that the history of the first is not written without mentioning the later, and vice versa. We often find that historians, who were biased fully to Saladin al-Ayyubi, had underestimated the role of Nur al-Din Mahmoud, and the same way was repeated when dealing with narrating the careers of Nur al-Din.

We can find an example of this in the treatment of the French historian Nikita Elisseff ⁽²⁶⁾ who had his Ph.D. from the Sorbonne University, upon his thesis entitled: "Nur ad - Din, un grand Prince Musulman au temps des Croisades".

He published this work, in 3 French volumes, in Damascus, 1967. And one of those volumes was translated into Arabic later.

This French orientalist demonstrated the role of Nur al-Din Mahmoud and sided with him, and underestimated Saladin without realizing that the two were prominent leaders of the Islamic Jihad Movement and that both complemented or completed the role of the other. Nur al-Din, also, was a teacher of Saladin and he was the one who guided, introduced and pushed him to the field of war and politics. Nur al-Din influenced greatly Saladin, as he was the architect of the Islamic Jihad movement in the second half of the twelfth century CE, and Saladin appeared consequently to complete his role without compromising his predecessor.

Ninth: There is predominance of the military and political history of Saladin in a way that is not balanced with his civilizational role.

Most historians have tended to highlight the role of that leader through his war struggle against the Crusaders, the decisive victory of Hattin in 1187 AD, and the events of the Third Crusade (1189 - 1192 AD) without realizing the centrality of his prominent urban civilizational role, as well as his leadership of a scientific and intellectual renaissance throughout his country, in a manner assured us of his understanding of the importance of preparing the nation for Jihad.

There is no doubt about the importance of Saladin's urban role during his reign, through the establishment of schools and hospitals. We have important indications about that through what al-Nuaimi (d. 1550 CE) wrote in the form of his book "The history of schools, or AL -Daris Fi Tarikh Al-Madaris", as well as the testimony of the Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubair ⁽²⁷⁾ (d.1217 CE) who visited The Levant during the reign of Saladin.

In addition to this, Saladin built military architectures, which included the Cairo Citadel "Qal'ait Al -Jabal" over Muqattam Hill ⁽²⁸⁾, as well as the fortresses of Sadr and the Soldier ⁽²⁹⁾ in Sinai, and the castle of Pharaoh's Island at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba ⁽³⁰⁾.

Tenth: Highlighting the masculine character of his history. In general, treating the history of Saladin has a negative aspect by showing it as the work of the military leaders, headed by the Sultan himself, and contrary, the role of women is dealt with timidly, as if it is marginal, despite its centrality. Here, we do not overlook that he obtained his genius and leading genes from his father Najm al-Din Ayyub, as well as his mother, about whom we do not know a single line in contemporary and later sources, due to the conservative nature of Islamic societies. Her career remains a mystery, even if we substitute for that by studying Kurdish folklore and history, which gave women more space than others.

In fact, the Ayyubid era witnessed what can be described as an undeniable feminist renaissance that began with the founder himself, represented in the role of the Ayyubid house khatuns ⁽³¹⁾ who were keen to set up schools, gorges and angles as endowments and competed each other's in this field. Therefore, it is difficult to highlight the history of

Saladin without showing the prominent influence of women during his reign, and he himself was influenced by the role of Ismat al-Din Khatun ⁽³²⁾ (d.1186 A.D); Nour al-Din Mahmoud's widow, and Salah al-Din's wife later, who used to consult her in matters of state, as she had a wise mind.

We conclude with a clear and undeniable fact that the history of the Sultan is a product of both masculinity and feminism, and here we do not overlook the reference to the centrality of the role of women, who benefited the home front in confronting the Crusaders during Saladin's reign and throughout the struggle with enemies until the end of the thirteenth century.

Eleventh: The mythical side of its history. It is noticeable that the Crusaders themselves wove a myth ⁽³³⁾ about the character of Saladin "Legend of Saladin". That was the first and last time in which medieval Europe weaves a myth about a prominent Muslim leader who fought it on the land of the Levant.

A prominent section of historians still considers myths as not being a source of history writing, although the myth has its own discipline "Mythology". And here we do not neglect to point out that peoples write their own history as myths, where historical truth meets popular imagination rooted over the centuries.

In fact, we have to take advantage of myths, including the myth of Saladin, in order to realize the extent of his prominent influence on the European collective mind, from the 12th century CE onwards. Also, we should not lose sight of the richness of European history in the Middle Ages with myths, such as: The myth of Frederick Barbarossa ⁽³⁴⁾ (d.1190 AD) Carolus Magnus, (D. 814 AD), the legend of the priest John ⁽³⁵⁾ and others.

All in all to say, we should make use of popular sources when studying the history of Saladin, and should not avoid using them under the pretext of academic boundaries.

Twelfth: There is a contrasting vision of prominent Mosul historians Ibn al-Atheer al-Jazari ⁽³⁶⁾ (d. 1232 CE), and Bahaa al-Din Ibn Shaddad ⁽³⁷⁾ (d. 1226 CE) towards the history of Saladin, as the former is generally prejudiced against him, and, as we have noted, he lurks errors about the failure of the siege of Tire during the events of the Third Crusade, as well as Saladin's situation in the defeat of Arsuf in 1191 AD, and so on. As for Bahaa al-Din Ibn Shaddad, we do not understand his bias to the Sultan except through the presence of a "Sufi bond" that brought them together, and therefore Ibn Shaddad dated precisely the last six years of his life (from 1188 to 1193 AD) where he remained with Saladin as his shadow. In this point, we cannot overlook noting that this historian had neither relatives nor children, so Saladin filled a psychological void with him, and the "chemistry" of the two men met together, and the result was producing Ibn Shaddad's wonderful book "The Anecdotes of the Sultan and the Benefits of Yusufism." Or "Al-Nawder al-Sultaniyyah wa al-Mahasen al -Yusifiyah"

Thus, we found Mosul had presented to us two contemporary historians of Saladin's career and biography, one of them is biased against him, and the other is biased towards him, so any modern historian who wanted to attack him would find his goal in Ibn al-Atheer's work, and whoever aligned himself with Saladin would find his goal with Ibn Shaddad's book. However, the diversity Perceptions would enrich the debate of assessing such prominent leader of the era of the Crusades, as well as the achievements of Muslims under his leadership.

We conclude this current research paper with several results, which are summarized as follows:

First: There are manifestations of the problem of writing the history of Saladin (1138 - 1193 AD) in a manner that was clarified in the elements of this study, in a way that confirmed to us the centrality of his role, as well as the difference in evaluating that role between eastern and western historians.

Second: The multiplicity of aspects of this problem confirms to us the fact that history - in general - has not yet said its last word and will not say it, and within that fact lays its vitality, and the difference and multiplicity of perceptions remain as evidence of continuity and the richness of the personality itself.

Third: Perhaps one of the most important findings of this research paper is the assertion that the hero in history is nothing but the secretion of his own era, and we, the Arabs, have to write our own history through our identity that expresses us , without being European or Americanized, regardless of the different views of the historian regarding the evaluation of the achievements of that leader.

This was a presentation of the most important features of the problematic study of the history of Saladin (1138-1193 AD).

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